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ABSTRACT

This paper: (1) examines the problems of teacher evaluation by college students; (2) underlines the difficulties of indiscriminant acceptance of raw data without considering the factors of teaching style, learning modalities, and educational goals; and (3) urges that evaluative instruments be used primarily for diagnostic purposes, for the improvement of learning, of teaching, and of the learner-teacher relationship. Three problem areas in particular are discussed: (1) the dilemma of teaching style, involving questions of teacher vs. student motivated learning; (2) the dilemma of recommendations to individual teachers, stressing the need for constructive evaluation, conditional upon the instructor's views of what is appropriate, practical, and desirable to him in respect to his instructional goals, and (3) the dilemma of designing valid evaluation instruments, instruments that take into account factors such as teaching modes, teacher expectations, learner performance, student workload both in and outside the class, and instrument internal consistency. Discussion of five factor analysis clusters determined by Hildebrand as characteristic of best/worst teachers illustrates further difficulties in evaluation procedures; the author offers remedial suggestions. (MB)

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DILEMMAS IN EVALUATING

THE LEARNING RELATIONSHIP

by Carl Slawski

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In the larger report (34 pages plus 31 pages of appendices) of which this presentation will be a summary and dramatic conclusion, I present an interpretive theoretical model of the learning relationship. It contains eleven clusters of variables, twelve hypotheses which deal not so much with the correlates of teacher-evaluation or popularity alone, but rather with the all-important relationship between a learner and his teacher, and this in the context of their institutional atmosphere and community setting. Later I spell out in full detail a procedure for conducting future studies using my three-part instrument (which totals 13 pages in length, including both open-ended and fixed-choice questions).

I summarize my typology (1972) of five teacher styles and five corresponding student-learning styles. Out of the combination of twenty five relationship styles, only five fit closely. And some of these are undesirable in themselves. They are 1) the colleague-colleague relationship, 2) the prince-disciple, 3) bureaucrat-stranger, 4) merchant-client, and 5) the personalist-needy types of relationship style.

Although the complete study and analysis was done of four classes, each taught by a different teacher, I report data in the text of the report itself from only two classes in Social Psychology, one taught by a Princess-Personalist type to her students who were mostly Disciples, the other taught by a Colleague type of facilitator to his largely Client type of students. The amount learned as rated by students was about the same in both cases. But the Princess received higher ratings on most other individual items rated by the students. Why?

Dilemmas of Teaching Style

The dilemma of the dominant lecturer (which would include our Princess-Personalist) is that students will most often be externally motivated. Passivity in students is produced and reinforced. Less work is ordinarily required or accomplished by students. And I fear they actually learn less (especially in the way of critical thinking), although they tend to perceive they learn a great deal (a perception which is probably more apparent than real). Thus the teacher will probably receive relatively higher ratings although the students learn less.

The dilemma of the student-centered facilitator is that the ordinarily passive majority of students will be slow to take the initiative, they will study less, fall behind, learn less and rate the teacher lower. On the other hand, if students are given a chance to choose a personally more meaningful topic their self-motivation will be greater, they will study harder, they will keep up with their tasks or their contract, they will learn more and as a result rate the teacher relatively high (although the teacher was very much in the background). This approach prepares the students much more naturally for participatory democracy and initiative in their community in post-college life. However, the immediate problem is that many students do not take the initiative soon enough. The teacher ratings are likely to be more highly polarized. I believe the ultimate value of the student-centered approach far outweighs the exigencies of relatively higher teacher ratings. The risk should be taken!

The Dilemma of Making Recommendations to Individual Instructors

An assessment of a teacher which fails to be constructive will invariably do more harm than good. Recommendations to particular instructors, of course, ought always to be tentative or conditional on what the instructor may decide is appropriate to him, to what he perceives as his capabilities

and desires after receiving meaningful feedback from observers and analysts of his classes, and of his tutoring of his students. In this spirit of tentative suggestion, I will list my recommendations to the above-mentioned teacher of Social Psychology whom I have labeled a Princess-Personalist type.

If she is interested in receiving the same kind of good teacher ratings in the future and is content with the possibility of not helping students to 1) change their society significantly, 2) learn how to learn independent of a teacher, or 3) master the field of social psychology in much breadth or depth, then she should continue teaching in the same style and with similar material in the future.

If on the other hand, she 1) is willing to risk somewhat lower ratings, and 2) has a sufficiently scholarly interest in the subject matter, and is also interested in helping students to 3) eventually change their society, and 4) learn how to learn, then she ought to try to 1) use more sophisticated and theoretically-oriented reading matter, 2) bring in more hypotheses and larger-scale whole theories instead of only applying concepts and labeling them as theories, 3) treat subjects in a way that might lead to more ideas about how to solve current social problems, 4) give more theoretically demanding tasks, 5) allow and promote more student initiative on reading and written tasks and unique contracts on practical applications of social psychological theories or techniques to problems of their own choosing. This would mean taking a sterner view of the theoretical and methodological aspects of the subject, as well as assuming more of a collegial stance in relationships with students. Either path has advantages and disadvantages which need to be given serious consideration by the instructor, our Princess-Personalist type.

Dilemmas of Designing a Valid Learning Evaluation Instrument

There are many problems with nearly all teacher-evaluation instruments. There are more problems with such instruments for the non-directive style of teaching, especially with a low-profile teacher. Experimentation and originality are minimized by such standardized instruments. Factor analysis (by Hildebrand, 197) showed up five clusters of items which distinguished nominated best and worst teachers. The clusters omit such factors as student work load in the course, whether the student kept up with assignments or even attended class, grading, and student accomplishment (either actual or even perceived accomplishment). And his instruments do not have repeated items which might be used for a reliability check or a check for internal consistency. In general, it largely assumes a predominantly lecture mode of teaching, with the goal of information transmittal, as do nearly all such fixed-choice questionnaire items. Hildebrand's work was chosen because it is among the very best (definitely better in my opinion than the ETS forms), because I have used a variation of his instrument in my own research in my own classes over longer than a five year period, and because a great deal of independent research has been done by several researchers using this instrument. Although his instrument is well-formulated and informative, I have personally found that it has weaknesses when data produced with this instrument are examined uncritically, without introducing statistical controls for intervening or interfering variables, especially for evaluation of a teacher who sees himself as a "facilitator" rather than a lecturer, who is demanding in his expectations, where the work-load appears great, where the burden of thought upon the student is great, where a high degree of student initiative is expected, and where the subject matter is directed in a heavily theoretical way, with a view to practical applications. The appearance of such a "facilitator" in a large department at a large university, where he is the only one with such unique expectations,

will inevitably show a different pattern of data and probably a somewhat lower average or overall rating by at least some students. It is more likely to show up in a bimodal distribution on such items as "the overall value of the course" or "effectiveness of this teacher".

I will now take up each of the five factor-analyzed clusters one by one, noting the items which fall under the cluster. Then I will point out weaknesses of this kind of instrument or these kinds of questions for the "facilitator" approach to teaching. Finally, some alternate types of questionnaire items will be listed which would be more appropriate, though most often at a wide tangent from the direction taken by the standard teacher-evaluation opinionnaires.

I) Analysis-Synthesis

Hildebrand's items which would identify a teacher who uses an approach that is analytic and synthetic include:

A) Has command of the subject.

B) Presents material in an analytic way.

C) Contrasts points of view.

D) Discusses current developments. And

E) Relates topics to other areas of knowledge.

Note that the implied direction of information flow is invariably from teacher to student. Some problems with these items would be their failure to consider the important factor of aiding the student in the selection of his own theoretical or practical problem (along with aid in setting up hypotheses, data-gathering and testing of the student's hypotheses about his chosen problem). A prime maxim of the facilitator is to point out directions, options or alternatives. He might then contrast alternate possible outcomes of two or more courses of action or study in dealing with the student's chosen problem. He would also encourage students to apply theories to their own lives rather than doing it for them, in predigested morsels, cellophane wrapped. He would also help students to

compare available extant theories pertaining to the problem at issue. Some questionnaire items that would replace the standard ones for our facilitator would be such as the following:

A) Did the facilitator provide the occasion (through the running of this course) for you (the student) to think for yourself?

B) Does he (or did he) allow, encourage or aid you to make a personal choice of problems or applications to work on or to study?

C) Did the course aid you in applying theories to your own life?

D) Did the management of the course allow, aid or encourage students to analyze and/or synthesize information and/or learning experiences for themselves.

E) Did the course provide the opportunity for you to learn to write good papers?

II) Organization-Clarity

The standard items which fall under the cluster (of Hildebrand) of organization and clarity include:

A) Makes himself clear.

B) States objectives.

C) Summarizes major points.

D) Presents material in an organized manner. And

E) Provides emphasis.

If our model facilitator uses an approach which is unfamiliar to most students in a mass university setting, many students would rate him low on several of these items, such as "Makes himself clear." The question ought to be: "Did he help the student clarify the issues and problems for himself?" The facilitator uses a tentative approach. Provisionalism is his byword. He gives no black-or-white answers. He offers multiple options, sees himself as a resource person above all. He knows that student immersion in the material is the best way for the student to learn to organize the material for himself. Meanwhile, he might provide detailed format sheets or check lists of questions to ask or answer in the course of reporting on

the student's investigation. He might provide summaries (using lecturettes) of applicable concepts and theories, or attempt to simplify material where it is unfamiliar to many of his students. He might then be judged more fairly by such questionnaire items as the following:

A) Was the facilitator of this course willing to help provide resources for you to aid you with your chosen tasks and projects?

B) Did the facilitator allow you freedom to choose from among different ways to complete the course requirements?

C) Did the facilitator discuss or provide guidelines, samples, models, or illustrations of completed papers or oral demonstrations, simulation games, discussions, etc., in order to help students to better complete their written and/or oral tasks?

D) Did the facilitator often give answers to student questions which seemed inappropriately oversimplified (e.g., giving either "pat answers", glib, or dogmatic, or black-or-white responses, needlessly or unrealistically brief explanations, perhaps "talking down" to students, spoon-feeding, candy-coating, etc.)?

III) Dynamism-Enthusiasm

Hildebrand's items would include:

A) Enjoys teaching.

B) Is enthusiastic about his subject.

C) Makes the course exciting. And

D) Has self confidence.

These are prodominantly personality related items, subject to a popularity halo in the ratings. A facilitator on the other hand would be non-discursive and play a low-key role. He might plan ice-breaker exercises or classroom demonstrations to loosen the flow of communication. He would try to be open and to encourage spontaneity on the part of students rather than being ascendent, failing to allow the quieter students time

and space to open their mouths. He might even fail in many of the usual teacher standards for oral expression or interpretation. But he would make a point to give frequent positive feedback to the successes or ideas or traits of each student, as far as this is possible in a mass setting. He will at least try to give meaningful written comments on students' papers to help them develop their strengths. This factor of dynamism-enthusiasm has the highest correlation with nominated "good" teaching. However, it smacks of entertainment and TV's Nielsen ratings, the notorious personality cult of the "ham" who teaches with a modicum of substance to his lectures. The facilitator shies away from such dramatization unless it can be used to rather directly draw out meaningful ideas and exchange of experiences from students themselves. He sees that passive listening is only the poorest of ways of really learning about a subject. The facilitator would prefer to be judged on such items as the following:

A) Did he try to facilitate or encourage students to learn how to learn for themselves?

B) Was he patient, understanding, and open to new opinions?

C) Did he give positive feedback to small and large successes of students (in or out of the classroom)?

These are obviously vastly different items from those used in Hildebrand's instrument.

IV) Instructor-Group Interaction

Hildebrand's items include:

A) Is sensitive to the response of the class.

B) Encourages student participation. And

C) Welcomes questions and discussion.

A facilitator ought to be a master at this. He would even develop a program of student-organized oral demonstrations and discussions of the theoretical material of the course. He would provide wide resources of simulations and other group experiences to develop cooperative learning

situations among his students. He would try to do this as early as feasible in the term or semester. He would encourage field trips and guest speakers to initiate discussion and thought and interest among the students themselves. He would prefer to be judged by such questions as:

A) Was the course set up in a way that helped provide the occasion for students to learn from other students?

B) Was the course or class time set up in such a way that willing students could meaningfully express themselves orally, in a small or large group setting?

V) Instructor-Individual Interaction

Hildebrand's items include:

A) Is available to and friendly toward students.

B) Is interested in students as individuals.

C) Is himself respected as a person. And

D) Is valued for advice not directly related to the course.

The problem of the mass educational institution is that there are always time conflicts between the office hours of the instructor and the available time of the working students (who are in the majority), and the commuters, and the athletes, especially in courses which are taken only because they are required rather than out of any intrinsic interest on the part of students. The facilitator's style and method require more individual consultation, among other things to work out unique contracts with individual students. He may well have the rapport and empathy but if students don't come to see him it will never be discovered. And if virtually all other teachers are working in the traditional lecture or dominant leader role, which requires little or no individual attention, most students will not quite catch on to the advantages of individual attention until the term is over with. When no more than a couple students will be enrolled in his classes in some future semester (because of the mass setting) the facilitator may be relegated to the role of guru among a select clique of followers. In any event, he would prefer that administrators

be aware of his intentions and the initiative of his students. He would prefer to be judged by such items as:

A) How many times have you consulted the instructor in his office (during office hours, or at other times outside of the classroom)?

B) Have you spent more than ten minutes during the term talking with the instructor (outside of the classroom)?

C) Was the instructor available for consultation during office hours?

D) Was he approachable?

E) (If you spent more than ten minutes or so talking to the instructor outside the classroom), was he willing to try to understand your personal way of learning and to offer constructive suggestions for reaching your goals?

My own short-form (38 item) instrument was developed in this vein. If we do not control for student initiative and readiness to learn we will certainly never obtain anything approaching valid data analyses.

Conclusion

Hildebrand more recently (1972) summarized his experience with evaluation instruments and procedures in an article pointedly entitled "How to Recommend Promotion for a Mediocre Teacher without Actually Lying." He points out that an alternate title for the article could be, "How to deny promotion to an excellent teacher without departing from accepted procedures." The possibilities and even commonplace events suggested by these titles occur even in departments and universities where teaching is indeed valued more highly than research. It seems further that where a single teacher-evaluation instrument is mandated for a department or even for a whole college, that the data ends up being used primarily and almost exclusively for administrative purposes. The primary value of such instruments in principle and practice ought definitely to be for the improvement of learning, of teaching, and of the learner-teacher relationship. They ought to be used as diagnostic instruments

in conjunction with peer evaluation via classroom visitations by sympathetic colleagues, and by the instructor's self evaluation of his successes and failings in dealing with each class evaluated. The results of such overall evaluations ought to be interpreted with the help of a master teacher or counselor from outside the administrative chain of command, and even from outside the instructor's own department if he so desires. More than one such full-time teacher-counselor should be employed at each college or university. The absence of such assistance gives the lie to the rhetoric about teaching being the important criterion for tenure or promotion or for the quality of the institution. It also gives the lie to an institution's alleged desire to promote better teaching. It leaves the data from teacher evaluations open to a variety of false interpretations and manipulations such that academic freedom is threatened under the guise or halo of numbers.

Methodologically speaking, an incomplete sample of classes, or a comparison of non-comparable courses, or non-comparable teaching styles, or teaching personality styles, or the absence of statistically valid "norms" (rather than comparative averages based upon incomplete data), all of these militate against the constructive use of campus-wide or even department-wide, single-form, standardized evaluation instruments, especially for non-standard teaching styles. If a teacher has success only with students who do their homework for example, and a third of the students (because of anti-intellectual inertia, or ingrained habit or tradition, or the working-commuter-student syndrome) fail to do their weekly homework assignments, then a third of the students will probably rate the teacher below average. Does this then mean that such a teacher is a bad teacher? Are we not sophisticated enough data analysts that we cannot introduce cross tabulations and statistical controls 1) for the work load of the course, 2) for the adequacy of student initiative, 3) for whether or not the individual student kept up with the assignments, and 4) for student

readiness to learn, etc.?

While the point seems obvious enough on the face of it, I have never ever seen such controls used when department chairmen or personnel committees have analyzed or summarized the data for recommendation or non-recommendation of a teacher for tenure or promotion, even in cases where several pages of data were cited. We are all guilty then of giving support and consolation to the positivist's blind faith in numbers, numbers in this case elicited from anonymous benefactors (the student raters). Or we are totally skeptical of evaluation instruments for self-serving reasons, or through fear of being discovered a below average teacher, or out of traditional notions of academic autonomy. As a result of these polarities it seems quite likely that petty political shenanigans will continue to dominate recommendations and evaluations of teaching and teachers. And the students will continue to be the losers in the long run. I for one am not content to put up with this status qup, either as far as concerns the superficiality of evaluations of my classes, or as far as the institutionally accepted teaching style goes. Innovation and creativity, experimentation and originality is being squelched. I for one am going to ooze up out of the slime of IBM cards bent, folded and crushed. I am going to make myself visible. I am going to stand up for my rights and those of my students to learn in the ways that best suit our characteristic personality and learning-relationship styles. I will allow space to combine the intellectual and theoretical with the emotional and the practical in the classroom, and out of the classroom. I will make space for the fuller expression of creative ideas, however unpopular, space for the best expression of talents possible with the help of a well-founded empathetic relationship between myself as facilitator and interested learners who will be treated as whole persons. This is my aim and my passion.